

Unity.

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*The
Amazing Inefficiency
of
Divided Protestantism*

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This address was delivered at the first annual Institute of Religion convened by Christian Herald, June 10th to 13th, 1929, at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania.

The theme of the Institute was "Next Steps Toward a United Church."

Mr. Horne Says:

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The Amazing Inefficiency of Divided Protestantism

Timeliness of a Laymen's Conference on Church Unity

The great inter-communion Church Conferences of recent years, meeting in Stockholm, Lausanne and Jerusalem, were largely composed of ministers and religious specialists, *but before real progress can be made the laity must be aroused and enlisted by such agitation of principles and appeal of facts as will create sentiment and stimulate action.*

Laymen are supposed to specialize in economics, but it should not be assumed that they think only in terms of material values. There should be closer unity in the spiritual and economic phases of our church work. Too often they have been in separate categories. Economic processes, secular and religious, certainly need Christianizing, but just as surely spiritual activities require the application of the laws of efficiency and productiveness.

Economic waste in church administration and competitive and unproductive expenditure have led the Church unwittingly

tingly into a situation which is equivalent to a diversion of trust funds and constitutes a collective sin of the churches. It should be affirmed that union of the churches should not mean less money required, but a more productive investment for an orderly expansion of the Christian program. It is quite probable that unity will require, and much more easily secure, far greater financial support than is now available under present unfavorable conditions.

Gains Common to the Church at Large

The economic implications of our church work cannot be lightly dealt with, when the enormous financial investments and the large outlay for support and maintenance are considered. The duality of the spiritual and economic phases is shown by the fact that this material foundation is required to produce spiritual returns. It is therefore pertinent to inquire whether the spiritual dividends are commensurate with the investment and overhead costs. Protestantism has about \$2,905,000,000 invested in church property; with 210,000 churches and about 32,000,000 members, but operating under more than 200 denominational units. The reported additions to the leading Protestant denominations during 1928 were 676,409, an increase of about 2%. When this advance is compared with the normal

increase of population; namely, $1\frac{1}{2}\%$, the gain is negligible. Such figures are not conclusive but they do not look like very encouraging success in winning disciples.

The power of these enormous material and personal resources which should be available for a victorious Christianity is dissipated and made fruitless by reason of futile divisions. This situation in any other line of human activity would call for immediate action to simplify and unify administration, conserve resources and produce adequate results. It is a definite process going on in the industrial and financial world of today, on the theory that unnecessary division in any common task is wrong in principle and wasteful in practice.

A commanding program of Church Unity would at once attract prominent laymen in business and professional life, many of whom are now indifferent to, if not estranged from, the church by reason of its confusing and conflicting divisions, and its failure to keep pace with the developments of modern times. These men are working in this busy world in an atmosphere well described in the report of the Committee on Recent Economic Changes, of which President Hoover was originally Chairman, as follows:

"The outpouring of energy which piled up skyscrapers in scores of cities; knit the forty-eight States together with twenty thousand miles of airways; moved each

year over railways and waterways more than a million and a half tons of freight; thronged the highways with twenty-five million motor cars; carried electricity to seventeen million homes; sent each year three and three-quarter million children to high school and more than one million young men and women to college; and fed, clothed, housed and amused the one hundred and twenty million persons who occupy our twentieth of the habitable area of the earth."

Laymen of affairs in these days are accustomed to unity in diversity. Large aggregations in the secular world are built up by the correlation and coördination of many varied units. Why cannot the harmony which prevails in corporate organization, in nature, in music and in art, be worked out in that highest of all fellowships, the spiritual church of Christ? In the old days it might have been held that the divisions were set up for conscience' sake, representing convictions and what was presumed to be vital differences. But today the futility of division based on ancient forms and statements of belief, is shown by the recent book by Dr. George Herbert Betts entitled, "The Beliefs of Seven Hundred Ministers," which shows in definite statement what is generally known—that there are wider differences within the denominations than between such communions.

Prof. A. S. Eddington, the noted Cambridge astronomer, in a recent address before the Quakers of London well states

the attitude of the modern mind toward creeds. He says:

"The spirit of seeking which animates us refuses to regard any kind of creed as its goal. Rejection of creed is not inconsistent with being possessed by a living belief. The belief is not that all our knowledge will survive in the letter, but a sureness that we are on the road."

The foes of Christianity and the principles of their attack are becoming consolidated. The materialistic philosophy of the present day with the secularization of life in many phases, which is world-wide in its scope, is the greatest single opponent of Christianity and the supremacy of a spiritual interpretation of life. This was brought out by Dr. Rufus M. Jones and others at the Jerusalem Council. Dr. Jones points out that

"the greatest rival of Christianity in the world is not Mohammedanism, or Buddhism, or Hinduism, or Confucianism, but the world-wide secular way of life and interpretation of the nature of things."

Dr. Jones concludes:

"The warfare of the sects and schisms is without doubt one ground among many for the existence of large numbers of unchurched people in all Christian countries. Many of those who would naturally respond to the appeal of authority lose the force of that appeal amidst the confusion of tongues and loud voices of divided claimants."

The enemy is united and the issue is drawn. The churches must unite, and under our Master who said "I have overcome the world," carry out victoriously

their program of the evangelization of the individual and the Christianization of society.

Gains in a United Protestantism in the United States

The gains of union can best be shown by pointing out the losses of our present divisions. There is always a loss of real values where spiritual fellowship in our religious life fails to exist because of sectarian exclusiveness and unbrotherly attitudes. This is expressed with respect to the sacraments, failure to recognize the validity of the ministerial office, credal forms, refusal to coöperate and in other ways. Ultimately these differences will be composed, but in the meantime denominations of similar type and spirit should come together in organic union as a demonstration and an example of the inevitable gains of a working fellowship. "Let those unite who will unite."

Many of the facts which will be used in the following sections of this paper regarding the weakness and losses of contemporary Protestantism are taken from the noteworthy book on this subject entitled, "Protestantism in the United States," by Archer B. Bass.

Surplus of Church Edifices

The evils of separation are shown by a study of the church edifices provided

by the various communions. It is stated that there are 183,505 white Protestant churches to serve a membership of 23,515,000. That is an average membership of 128 persons per church. In contrast, the Roman Catholic Church provides 16,616 edifices for 18,104,800 communicants, giving an average of 1089 members to the church. Catholic unity versus Protestant division on this point would seem to establish a ratio for efficiency of over 8 to 1. It is further declared that the Protestant Church edifices of the country provide three times as many sittings as there are members, while the Roman Catholic church has an approximate proportion of two and a half communicants for every sitting provided, practically reversing the proportion. Even if the entire white non-Catholic population of the country were assigned to our white Protestant churches we would have an average allotment of 587, which is decidedly smaller than the average of the communicants of the Catholic churches.

Over-Churched and Under-Churched Communities

Indiscriminate locations, over-churched conditions and weak leadership were clearly brought out in a survey made by the Inter-Church World Movement in 1919, based on a study in the state of Ohio. The summary of facts shows that 55% of rural churches had an average

of 75 members each, and that 87% of the ministers of such churches were non-resident and many giving only part time service. A typical county with a population of 30,400 had 5770 church members, or 19% of the population, distributed in 63 churches averaging 91 members each.

The Institute of Social and Religious Research, in a study of 179 counties in 44 states, reports that they found one church to every 463 inhabitants, ranging from one church for 163 persons, to one church for 11,000 people, indicating both extremes of under-churched and over-churched communities. In a further survey, in 1926, in 140 village communities of from 500 to 2500 population each, it was found that there were 1400 churches. It was disclosed that 21 villages had less than two churches per thousand inhabitants, 49 villages averaged between two and three, 40 between three and four, and thirty had four and over. Some communities had as high as seventeen churches.

Ministers' Salaries

A study of ministers' salaries is illuminating, as indicating inefficiency and un-economic conditions both intolerable and un-Christian. In certain rural sections including town and country churches with full time services, the average salary was about \$1,000 including rent. The average in cities of 25,000 population and upward

was \$1,768. In towns having one to four churches, the average was \$1,001, and in towns having five to thirteen churches the average was \$842. An interesting comparison can be made with community churches where some form of unity has been worked out. In a study of town and country united churches in 25 counties, the following figures are given in contrast to strictly denominational churches in the same territory:

Strictly denominational churches,	
average salary	\$1,030.
United Church (under denomina-	
national auspices)	1,599.
Federated churches	1,865.
Interdenominational community	
churches	1,653.

This is surely a demonstration of the economic gain of the process of unity.

Inadequate Program and Equipment

Consideration of the poor buildings, lack of equipment and program which the average rural and village church affords indicates the reason for the decline of Protestantism in certain sections of our country. Such churches have been well described as "consecrated one-room barns," which by their unattractiveness drive away the young people who contrast these churches with the attractive secular facilities provided for education, recreation and entertainment in their communities. Obsolescence and depletion of equipment

is the foe of progress in any enterprise. Business takes account of this but not so the church. The proportion of poorly equipped, antiquated and obsolete buildings is very large. Many structures in their day were adequate and imposing, but now are not attractive nor adapted to the modern program. The accepted standard is for a three unit structure providing for worship, for recreation and fellowship, and for education. Only a united church can face this task of reconstruction of plant and community program which is needed to command respect and win the people.

City and Suburban Protestantism

The inability of divided Protestantism to cope with changing conditions is evidenced by the church situation in our cities. Here, too, the only check on losses and needless duplication is consolidation with provision for modern buildings and equipment, which must be accomplished, however difficult, or the process of decline and death will continue. Dr. Paul H. Douglas in his book, "The St. Louis Church Survey," a most complete, able and typical study of city Protestantism, calls the city church a high hazard and points that in St. Louis between 1899 and 1919 fifty-seven churches passed out of existence, a mortality of 25 per cent. In his findings, Dr. Douglas reports that city

churches are suffering under population changes, burdensome overhead, meager support, excessive turnover of members and large disappearance losses. He states, "The most dependable hope for the future is the growing unity of Protestantism."

Our weakness is also shown by failure to make provision for increase of resident population in the outskirts of large cities. In the Borough of Queens, New York City, from 1920 to 1927 there was an increase of over half a million people, but only the most meager and inadequate provision has been made to serve this new group largely composed of working people and the clerking classes.

Economies in Home Mission Work

According to the United States Census Report of 1916, (later specific reports not being available), 79 Home Mission Boards of white Protestant denominations gave \$17,263,840 to definitely home mission work. This includes the salaries in whole or in part of 27,982 pastors and missionaries, and aid of 29,283 churches. It is known that missionary giving since 1916 has increased about 90%; therefore the appropriations for strictly home mission aid must now be well over \$30,000,000 per annum. What justification can there be for the multiplied over-

head board expense, the unnecessary number of detached staff and the evils of a competitive bureaucracy implied in such administration? More than this, is it not inevitable that home missionary funds given in the spirit of stewardship and sacrifice, are being used to perpetuate if not to pauperize many competitive and weak societies in over-churched communities? What are the facts?

In two surveys involving over 21 states and many denominations it was found that from 20 per cent to 22 per cent of the churches are being helped financially. A study of 211 aided churches in 25 counties disclosed that 41 had a legitimate field, 41 were competing with other Protestant churches of different type and form of service, 78 were in direct competition with other aided churches, and 51 were competing with self-supporting and similar type of churches. That is, 60 per cent of these societies were being assisted in competitive over-churched fields. This sort of thing leads to absurd and inexcusable survival of the unfit. In 38 communities there were 45 aided and 74 self-supporting churches operating together. This represents one church for each 276 of population, and if all the aided churches were discontinued there would still be one self-supporting church for each 404 of population, against a normal ratio of one church to 1,000 people.

The Home Mission Council is, of course, dealing with this problem and can accomplish much in so far as it can secure coöperation, but the only permanent remedy would seem to be ultimate organic unity.

Denominational Organizations

No appraisal of economics would be complete without reference to the commanding advantages of mergers in connectional agencies, in the various communions. Many denominational papers are now run at a heavy loss, and are being subsidized by benevolence funds. Church schools, colleges and seminaries are having a hard time and consolidation would not only be an economy but place our educational institutions, as our literature should be, above the accusation of sectarian propaganda and the use of unscientific standards. Publishing interests, hospitals, homes for the aged and other philanthropies would give larger service at less cost in money and personnel if under the united auspices of general Protestantism.

The United Church of Canada is a demonstration and an exhibit of what happens when church unity is accomplished. Administrative Boards have been consolidated, church papers united, schools brought together, 560 charges reduced to half that number, home mission charges

made self-supporting, new missions opened, ministers given a man's job and the per capita giving increased, in the short time this union has been effective.

Union Imperative in the Foreign Mission Enterprise

The evangelization of the world and the Christianizing of society in every land constitute the greatest challenge of the church. A divided church, however, can accomplish neither, and the attempt to export our denominational distinctions to un-Christian lands is a reproach to our Christianity and a denial of the great commission.

The problem of unity on the foreign field is too great and the situation too critical to state the case in terms of economic gains and losses. This is implicit in the reduction of overhead, but the real essence is the saving of the whole situation. They are bound to unite whether we will or not, and the peril is that young churches overseas in certain countries will organize National Churches which in effect will add new communions and tend to emphasize a narrow patriotism and nationalism rather than a world encircling Christianity.

Bishop Brent at Lausanne in his opening sermon said:

“What a challenge to Christendom to set its own house in order before it further infect the Eastern world with sectarianism that robs the gospel of its corporate power and gives people a stone instead of bread! The 100 missionary societies in China to-day are as suicidal for Christianity as the civil divisions are to her national peace and prosperity.”

Conclusion of the Whole Matter

After all that can be said concerning specific cases of loss and inefficiency in our divisions, and the gains from unity, the great and sufficient demonstration of the need of a United Church is the challenge of the unfinished task, the halting advance we are making, the divisive and un-Christian attitudes still prevailing, the delayed execution of the great commission and failure to help Christ answer his prayer,

“That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me.”

The publication of this pamphlet was made possible through the generosity of Mr. E. M. McBrier, Montclair, N. J.

What Union Has Done in Canada

In June, 1925, the Congregational, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian churches of Canada united, forming the United Church of Canada. Four years have passed. The results:

There has been a substantial decrease in the number of administrative head by reason of the coördination of efforts of the three churches.

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Cost of education in Theological Seminaries has been cut down, the number of schools reduced, their efficiency raised.

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The givings of the people has increased. The treasurer of the United Church states that the gifts of the people in the new church have averaged 20 per cent more than the givings in the respective churches before union.

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Home Mission work has improved greatly and become far more effective than was the case before union.

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The union has removed, to a very considerable degree, the scandal of the multiplication of Protestant churches in small communities, where the congregations had to struggle to support a number of ministers to do the work that could be done adequately by one.



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Christian Herald, always a crusading journal, has this as a permanent platform: To conserve, interpret, and extend the vital elements of Evangelical Christian faith. To support *World Peace*: that it may be world-wide and lasting; *Church Unity*: that it may be an organic reality; *Prohibition*: that it may be sustained and become world-wide. To carry forward a practical ministry to those who are in need. To champion those forces . . . wherever they appear . . . that bid fair to aid in the effort to make a Christ-like world.

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